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ABSTRACT

This report contains 10 articles, written by national and state leaders in the adult literacy field, that pose challenges confronting the adult literacy system. The articles provide a framework for states to use in beginning the process of achieving a literate citizenry and work force. Titles and authors are as follows: "Building State Literacy Systems" (Susan E. Foster); "Strategies for Developing a State Literacy Infrastructure" (Karl Haigler); "Goals and Targeting in Adult Learning Systems" (Jack A. Brizius); "Designing Quality Programs in Adult Literacy: State and Local Program Initiatives" (Judith A. Alamprese); "Effectively Training an Adult Basic Education Workforce" (Sondra Gayle Stein); "Strategies for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Programs" (Thomas G. Sticht); "The Case for Family Literacy Programs" (Sharon Darling); "Valuing the Human Resource" (Don Woodside); "Nine Points about Organized Labor's Participation in State Workplace Literacy Initiatives" (Anthony R. Sarmiento); and "The State Role in Adult Literacy Policy" (Jack A. Brizius). (KC)

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MEETING THE GOAL OF A LITERATE AMERICA: THE STATE RESPONSE

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NATIONAL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

State Policy Reports

Human Resources Policy Studies

Training and Employment Program

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MEETING THE GOAL OF A LITERATE AMERICA: THE STATE RESPONSE

NATIONAL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

State Policy Reports

Human Resources Policy Studies

Training and Employment Program

Edited by Robert A. Silvanik

State Literacy Exchange
Center for Policy Research

National Governors' Association

The National Governors' Association, founded in 1908 as the National Governors' Conference, is the instrument through which the nation's Governors collectively influence the development and implementation of national policy and apply creative leadership to state issues. The association's members are the Governors of the fifty states, the commonwealths of the Northern Mariana Islands and Puerto Rico, and the territories of American Samoa, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. The association has seven standing committees on major issues: Agriculture and Rural Development; Economic Development and Technological Innovation; Energy and Environment; Human Resources; International Trade and Foreign Relations; Justice and Public Safety; and Transportation, Commerce, and Communications. Subcommittees and task forces that focus on principal concerns of the Governors operate within this framework.

The association works closely with the administration and Congress on state-federal policy issues through its offices in the Hall of the States in Washington, D.C. The association serves as a vehicle for sharing knowledge of innovative programs among the states and provides technical assistance and consultant services to Governors on a wide range of management and policy issues.

The Center for Policy Research is the research and development arm of NGA. The center is a vehicle for sharing knowledge about innovative state activities, exploring the impact of federal initiatives on state government, and providing technical assistance to states. The center works in a number of policy fields, including agriculture, economic development, education, environment, health, social services, training and employment, trade, and transportation.

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Foreword

The adult literacy and basic skills movement in the states is at a crossroad. In the past, adult literacy was a major priority only for a few highly committed advocates and providers. Over the last ten years, literacy has evolved into an issue that holds a coveted place on the national policy agenda. Today the movement has the opportunity to garner widespread support and recognition. At the same time, however, it must confront the challenge of achieving a national literacy goal. This goal was adopted in February 1990 by the nation's Governors and the President:

> By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The goal refers to literacy in the broadest sense. Its objectives include a strengthened connection between education and work, better workforce education and training opportunities, appropriate training programs for part-time and mid-career workers, and improved student achievement and attainment at the postsecondary level.

While current estimates of the number of functionally illiterate adult Americans range from 23 million to 70 million, there is no comprehensive information base to provide an accurate picture of the literacy problem in the United States. However, some initial steps recently undertaken may help indicate the dimensions of this problem. At the national level, two important studies are underway. The U.S. Department of Labor, in conjunction with the Educational Testing Service, is conducting a Workplace Literacy Assessment to assess the literacy skills of Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and employment service and unemployment insurance populations. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, also in conjunction with the Educational Testing Service, is conducting a National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) to assess the literacy skills of a nationally representative sample of adults between the ages of sixteen and sixty-four.

At the state level, the literacy needs of specific population groups, such as welfare recipients, are being evaluated. States also have the option to conduct state-specific studies concurrent with the NALS project. Finally, company literacy audits are being used to assess the literacy needs of the current workforce.

Even though we do not yet have hard numbers on the scope of our literacy problem, we do know that the Governors and the President have established an ambitious goal for the nation. The achievement of this goal will require a broad national effort. Moreover, well-coordinated and efficiently operated adult learning systems in the states will be vital to providing accessible and high quality literacy and basic skills services at the local level, where clients receive instruction.

Given this perspective, the key question for the state adult literacy and basic skills community is: Are we ready and willing to establish adult learning systems in our

states? Many state leaders answer this question in the affirmative, though the limited evidence suggests otherwise.

Created in early 1990, the State Literacy Exchange is a network of state leaders in literacy. It serves as a national point of contact and assistance, facilitating information sharing and the adaptation of "best practices" in the states. The State Literacy Exchange is in the process of surveying over 400 state literacy contacts in order to begin to develop information on the nature of state-level and statewide literacy efforts throughout the nation.

Preliminary analysis of more than 200 survey responses makes it clear that state leaders recognize the need to develop efficient and coordinated literacy systems in their states. They also recognize that much needs to be done to accomplish this objective, since most states are either in the embryonic stage of developing an adult literacy system or have not yet begun to plan for one. A very high percentage of respondents indicate an interest in participating in a long-term and intensive technical assistance activity designed to help selected states develop adult learning systems. Most of them also are willing to cover the expenses of their participation.

We know that the present system for providing literacy and basic skills training to adults in the states is a complex and diffuse patchwork of public and private programs with three main problems. First, the system is fragmented due, in part, to reliance on discretionary and unreliable funding, the myriad rules and regulations attached to these funds, and the variety of highly targeted programs that deliver literacy and basic skills services. Second, the system fails to serve large numbers of persons who need services and offers only low-intensity services to many who are receiving them. Third, the system does not provide adequate opportunities for students to learn applied and conceptual skills needed for success in the workplace. These problems must be overcome in order for an efficient and coordinated adult learning system to be developed.

In addition to these systemic shortcomings, each state has its own set of circumstances that must be considered in developing an adult learning system. These include the political environment; the historical relationships among and between state agencies and other statewide organizations administering or funding literacy programs; and the personal relationships among key state leaders. However, there are certain key strategies for developing an adult learning system that transcend individual state circumstances.

In *Educating America: State Strategies for Achieving the National Education Goals*, the nation's Governors outline a number of steps required for developing adult learning systems:

- States should determine the dimensions of their adult literacy problem and analyze how educational achievement levels correspond with the demands of society and the workplace.
- States should bring together all of the relevant players in their adult education network to establish priorities and performance expectations for all publicly funded programs.

- States should create accountability systems that use multiple performance indicators and require providers to report annually to the state on their performance.
- States should establish a new comprehensive competency-based approach to skill certification, which begins in school and continues through the after-school years, in place of the current practice of incompatible credit and credentialing procedures among diverse programs.
- States should increase the the range of settings in which learning occurs by promoting the development and enhancement of alternative community-based programs; intergenerational, workplace, and other contextual learning programs; and nonpublic programs, including volunteer efforts.
- States should promote self-directed learning and consumer choice by developing a system of lifelong education for adult learners that enables them to define and redefine career and education goals throughout their lives.

These are the basic elements that should guide states as they build state infrastructures with the goal of developing an adult learning system. The intent of this report is to lay out the challenges that lie ahead and present some practical models and approaches for states to consider in constructing an adult learning system. Innovative and successful policies and programs are being implemented by states throughout the country. Governors are embracing adult literacy as an important human resource issue and economic development tool.

This report contains ten articles written by national and state leaders in the adult literacy field who pose important challenges confronting the system. Together they provide a framework for states to use in beginning the process of achieving a literate citizenry and workforce.

- A compelling dissertation is provided by Sue Foster in "Building State Literacy Systems." The article summarizes the literacy challenges confronting states today, reviews where we have been, and discusses where we need to go.
- Following this overview, in "Strategies for Developing a State Literacy Infrastructure," Karl Haigler outlines the specific objectives of a state infrastructure, important issues to be addressed in developing one, and the significant role that Governors can play in this effort.
- Jack Brizius then explores the issue of targeting our limited resources in "Goals and Targeting in Adult Learning Systems."
- In "Designing Quality Programs in Adult Literacy: State and Local Program Initiatives," Judy Alamprese examines the state education department's role in working with literacy programs to build systems for quality instructional services.
- Sondra Gayle Stein presents a state model for the dissemination of new skills and information to literacy instructors in "Effectively Training an Adult Basic Education Workforce."

- In "Strategies for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Programs," Tom Sticht writes on the importance of assessing literacy programs and how the reasons for the program assessment affect the type of assessment that is done.
- "The Case for Family Literacy Programs" is made by Sharon Darling, emphasizing family literacy's holistic approach to serving families and detailing components of quality family literacy programs.
- Don Woodside describes the challenges facing the American workforce and workplace and recommends some state responses in "Valuing the Human Resource."
- Nine important points regarding "Organized Labor's Participation in State Workplace Literacy Initiatives" are presented by Anthony Sarmiento.
- Finally, as a summary and conclusion, Jack Brizius poses and addresses eight key questions that states must confront in defining "The State Role in Adult Literacy Policy."

Literacy efforts in the states have come a relatively long way in a short period. Yet, much work remains before literacy services are accessible to all adults who need them and are of sufficient quality to increase the basic skill abilities, and the opportunities for success, of students in the programs. The national literacy goal serves as a rallying point for state-level and statewide literacy agencies and organizations. The challenge of achieving this goal lies ahead. It is hoped that these authors set a course for action at the state and local levels that will result in a more literate citizenry and workforce for the nation.

Robert A. Silvanik
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The State Literacy Exchange was established through the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Gannett Foundation. Housed in the Training and Employment Program of the National Governors' Association (NGA) Center for Policy Research, the exchange is a central point of contact at the national level for state literacy efforts. It serves state literacy leaders, including Governors and their staffs, and supports states in the development and implementation of policies and programs to improve literacy levels in the United States.

This project would not have been possible without the expertise and commitment of the authors, each of whom is a national leader in the field of adult literacy. Very special thanks are extended to: Susan E. Foster and Jack A. Brizius, Partners, Brizius & Foster, McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania; Karl Haigler, Special Adviser to the Governor, Governor's Office for Literacy, Jackson, Mississippi; Judith A. Alamprese, Director, Education and Training Group, COSMOS Corporation, Washington, D.C.; Sondra Gayle Stein, Director, Commonwealth Literacy Campaign, Boston, Massachusetts; Thomas G. Sticht, President, Applied Behavioral & Cognitive Sciences, Inc., San Diego, California; Sharon Darling, President, National Center for Family Literacy, Louisville, Kentucky; Don Woodside, Staff Director, California Workforce Literacy Task Force, Sacramento, California; and Anthony R. Sarmiento, Assistant Director, AFL-CIO Education Department, Washington, D.C.

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Building State Literacy Systems

by Susan E. Foster

In some very important ways, the literacy business has come a long way in recent years. Only three years ago, those working in literacy programs were the only ones who cared about the issue. In this short time, awareness of the importance of literacy has increased strikingly. Our Governors have adopted national goals for education that include literacy. We are much closer than we were a year ago to having federal legislation that would support and spur literacy enhancement activities in the states. Soon we will see the creation of state literacy resource centers. The Southern Growth Policies Board is in the process of creating a southern regional literacy foundation. And we are closer to being able to define and estimate the size and nature of the population needing literacy skill improvements. This is thanks to the efforts of the U.S. Department of Labor, the Educational Testing Service, and pioneer efforts in several states.

We should feel good about this progress. We should be proud of these accomplishments, but we must be sober about the task yet at hand. We face the challenge of raising the literacy skills of a nation. To do this, we have some rather enormous tasks to accomplish. We must build a support system for literacy in our states—a literacy infrastructure. Through this infrastructure, we must meet the challenges of improving the quality of our programs, and of attracting adult learners and retaining them long enough to achieve practical skill gains. And we must create a literacy profession. In these areas, unconscionably, there have been minor gains. We should be feeling mounting pressures to perform. We no longer have the luxury of endless deliberation about these issues. The nation's Governors have called our hand.

Think about this event. For years, those in the literacy business have been struggling to gain public support for literacy enhancement. Just last year, a significant amount of time was spent deliberating on how to gain the support of political leaders. Now we have a resolution passed unanimously by the Governors of this country setting the goal of a literate nation by the year 2000. The tables have been turned. Our destination has been set, and the proverbial train has left the station.

This means that the time for consciousness-raising is long gone. The time for protracted discussions on how to coordinate state literacy programs is past. The time for squabbles over program ownership is over. If you are still engaged in these activities you will be left behind. Now we must focus on meeting the national literacy goal, rather than on encouraging that it be set. The question is: "Are we prepared?"

Many will look to the federal government for leadership and help. When federal legislation passes, we will have help in reaching this goal, though we also will have new federal requirements to meet. We cannot afford to wait for federal action. We have a train to catch. To catch that train, we must be very specific about what we need to do.

First, we must create literacy systems in our states. We must create a literacy infrastructure. This means that we must build a support structure around and through our current literacy programs. We must build the mechanism for pulling existing literacy programs together. We must create a structure and environment wherein we set performance standards for literacy programs, measure our successes and failures, and systematically assess how our programs are faring. We must build the capacity to

provide staff training. We must develop the procedures for targeting funds and for creating viable options for adult learners.

These are the bricks and mortar of a literacy system. Without them we will surely fail to reach our goal. With them we can move ahead. It is easy to discount the importance of this step. It is easy to delude ourselves into thinking that our programs are working and that our talk of interagency coordination and cooperation is really having some effect.

We know that the reality is that we are not equipped to do the job now demanded of us. The reality is that our discussions of coordination rarely, if ever, address the substantive issues of program content, performance-based outcomes, learners' needs, or professional development. These issues will not be addressed unless we create an organization structure and environment that requires it to happen.

We must create in each state a long-term institutional base for literacy enhancement. In only a few states is this issue being addressed head-on. For example, Mississippi has created a Governor's Office of Literacy that is coordinating literacy services across programs, and Kentucky has created a Central Literacy Office that provides services. Indiana has created a Governor's Office of Workforce Literacy that is charged with the responsibility for building a literacy system in the state. If we are to meet the goal of a literate nation, each state will have to take similar action.

We must identify or create an organizational entity under the direct control of the Governor that can rise above program distinctions and disagreements, set standards for quality literacy programs, create a system of accountability across programs, develop approaches for attracting and retaining adult learners, and provide training and professional development opportunities for program staff.

We must weave together adult basic education programs, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs, Family Support Act programs, VISTA programs, and library and community college programs. We must bring in volunteer groups, labor and union leaders, employers, and adult learners. We must weave all these programs and actors together with the common threads of standards, performance requirements, training, assessment, and research. To do this we need an institutional base with the authority to bring all the actors to the table. And we have to understand the requirements embedded in each of these programs. We have to know them in order to use them.

Creating this literacy system at the state level is a necessary condition for meeting the national goal of a literate nation. It will enable us to solve two difficult challenges now facing the literacy field: improving the quality of programs and attracting and retaining adult learners.

Only limited progress has been made on the task of improving the quality of our literacy programs. We are still faced with the fact that very few programs can demonstrate practically significant learning gains.

Of course, part of the problem is that we still have not settled on a meaningful way to measure success, though now there are more options. Both Mississippi and Oregon are developing assessment instruments to estimate the literacy skills and needs of their populations. These tests are based on the assessment instrument used

by the Educational Testing Service in its 1986 National Assessment of Educational Progress of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds. Literacy providers can adapt these tests for their own use.

There is a larger reason why we cannot demonstrate practically significant learning gains. It is because we at the state level have not developed a system for systematically sharing elements of best practice among literacy providers. Too many programs are still operating independently, without the benefit of knowledge gained through research and practice. A knowledge base exists that could guide the development of a set of standards for practice, but there is no infrastructure to make this transition. However, we do have some vehicles to help us build this infrastructure.

For example, the federal Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program requires states to assess the educational, child care, and other supportive service needs of each JOBS applicant. If literacy improvement is indicated, then the state contracts for services from existing agencies or creates new services if none are otherwise available.

In implementing the JOBS program, one can begin to create the threads that will weave these programs together. One can simply require that literacy providers from whom services are purchased receive pre- and in-service training in standards for quality literacy programs. One can further stipulate that funding be performance-based (i.e., agreement is reached on the required level of skill improvement in a specified time and payment is provided accordingly). One can provide incentives for higher levels of skill gains. Moreover, one can stipulate performance in terms of job-related skills, not grade level completions or performance on academic-based tests.

Similar requirements could be instituted in JTPA programs, though something must be done about the proposed JTPA amendments that measure skill increases by grade levels. Finally, one could build these requirements into all literacy programs, including adult basic education. This will build the required infrastructure for literacy.

Another major challenge that could be addressed through a state literacy system is that of attracting adult learners to, and retaining them in, our programs. We know that even if there were enough quality programs to serve all who need help, there still is no guarantee that people will take advantage of them. We know that this is the case, yet we have not done enough to change it. Part of the problem is the quality of our programs. Retention rates are low because adult learners do not see the relationship between what is being taught and what they need or want to know.

However, some notable exceptions are emerging. First are workplace-based instructional programs that link skill improvement to everyday job tasks, and overall literacy improvement to job retention or advancement. Second are family literacy programs in which parents learn to read to their children. In both cases, the program goals are directly related to the goals of the learners—a clear motivation for staying in the program.

To attract adult learners, we will have to identify the reasons why persons needing literacy training do not seek help. We know many of the reasons: They do not want to identify themselves as illiterate; they are unaware of where they can get help;

they are fearful that they could lose their jobs; they have been able to get by without skill enhancement and will not do anything unless a crisis occurs; they do not know how to solve their dependent care or transportation problems; or their partner opposes their efforts to increase their skills.

These problems are all solvable, but they require attention at the state as well as at the program level. The individual education plan required under JOBS provides an excellent context for addressing these kinds of problems. In our other programs such as JTPA and adult basic education, we could require that these issues be identified and addressed as part of each literacy program.

Broader action also is needed to create this part of the infrastructure. We need a state literacy office to work with employers and union and labor leaders in order to create conditions on the job that are conducive to skill enhancement. A nationally known expert on workforce literacy, Vern Pulling, suggests that we create a literacy corps of employers. These employers would commit to helping employees improve their skills and agree not to place negative sanctions on employees participating in literacy training.

We need to expand our efforts to offer information about where persons can go for assistance. Pulling has another interesting idea: We could train literacy counselors to help individuals assess their skill level and how far they need to move up the literacy continuum and refer them to appropriate services. We might build on his idea by suggesting that these counselors help adult learners develop a contract with a literacy provider to realize a specific and measurable skill gain.

There are many other tools available to the state to attract or retain adult learners that could be incorporated into a state literacy system to form part of our support structure:

- We could condition benefits and employment upon skill upgrading.
- We could use the tax system to influence the private sector to support literacy enhancement.
- We could use the licensing process to identify persons who need additional skills.
- We could use a variety of state programs to influence the response of local governments to the literacy problem.
- We could use tax incentives, stipends, unemployment compensation benefits, and other positive and negative sanctions to influence learners.

Creating a literacy infrastructure is a necessary condition for meeting the goal of a literate nation, though by itself, it is not a sufficient condition. The other major task that we must accomplish is to create a literacy profession.

We have no literacy profession in this country, and we are no closer to having one today than we were one year ago. We have many people working in the field. We have a growing amount of resources devoted to the problem. We are having more conferences. One might assume that there actually is a profession, or one might conclude that worrying about a profession ought to be last on our list of priorities.

Yet, this is a review of the current state of affairs:

- Our programs still lack a common orientation and knowledge base rooted in basic and applied research and development.
- Our programs still lack quality standards for what happens in the classroom.
- Our programs are still low-budget items with limited resources for staff development, training, instructional materials, and self-evaluation.
- We still offer low levels of compensation to literacy staff, with no career paths.
- Administrative staff too often are part-time employees who have other responsibilities that eclipse the literacy agenda.
- In too many states we still have a limited network for information sharing.
- All too often our programs are generic in nature, rather than directed to specific and quantifiable goals shared by the learner.
- Finally, we provide no support for learning the most effective teaching methods.

Addressing these issues should be on the agenda of any state literacy system. They will form the buildings, roads, and bridges of our infrastructure. They also are the issues that a profession should be addressing. In the best sense, a profession seeks to advance the state of the art, create conditions that attract persons to the field, set standards for practice, and ensure quality.

To create a profession, efforts must focus on four areas:

- We must create an institutional infrastructure to support professional development, best practices, and research and development.

  This can be done by incorporating requirements for in- and pre-service training into our literacy programs. We can build state literacy centers for staff development and training, information dissemination, and research and development.

- We must create a culture among literacy providers that rewards the application of knowledge to teaching, encourages creativity and experimentation, and works toward the refinement of standards of practice.

  The state literacy system can adopt standards for practice across all programs and retrain all existing program staff in these standards. We can orient our research and practice to accountability in the field. And we can set goals for programs that are related to the skill enhancement of adult learners. We can establish university-based programs in adult literacy. We can create a reward system for contributions to the field.

- We must provide resources to teachers and administrators for training and professional development.

- We must increase levels of compensation. Salary increases should be provided for all providers who have gone through orientation and training in these standards and who commit to in-service training and a program of professional development. We should require that programs provide paid time-off for professional development as well as ensure that funds to support staff training and development are built into each program budget. We also can experiment with multi-year funding for literacy providers in order to permit the amortization of equipment costs, and to take into account the fact that skill enhancement often is a multi-year process.

To build a profession, we can and must create a cadre of staff who are not owned by any one program or literacy faction and who can work across programs. We must use programs to pool resources to hire full-time teachers, acquire needed equipment, and develop materials. As Forest Chisman, director of the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, states: "We must make literacy a function in its own right rather than an aspect of federal or state programs."

We have a goal—a literate nation by the year 2000. Now we should be feeling many pressures to meet this goal and considerable anxiety about reaching it. While many pressures will come from the national level, the solutions will come from the state and local levels and from the providers.

In the last year the questions facing the literacy field have changed. The questions are no longer "Where are we going?" or even "How do we get there?" We have answered these questions. The question now is: "Are we willing to build the support system that will enable us to move toward our goal?" Building that system is our challenge.

Strategies for Developing a State Literacy Infrastructure

by Karl Haigler

At first it may appear somewhat presumptuous to outline the need for an adult literacy or basic skills "system," whether our focus be at the national or at the state level. For in any number of reports by gubernatorial task forces or state coalitions we hear that the literacy "field" or "provider network" is "fragmented" and that efforts to address "the issue" are "uncoordinated and lacking in coherence." Nevertheless, these same reports usually include admonitions such as "the state must" or "literacy providers ought to." Then there is the ubiquitous "we," as in "we should see to it that literacy efforts are better coordinated and are marked by cooperation between both the public and private sectors, and by collaboration among state agencies."

Having worked in a state for the past year and a half, and having participated at the federal level in helping states develop literacy policies, I would like to make the following recommendations to all those who aspire to advising states, and more specifically Governors, in the area of literacy:

- Whenever you use the imperatives "must," "should," or "ought," specify who should be given the responsibilities to coordinate, foster collaboration, or facilitate coalition-building.
- Having made the bold step of being specific about responsibility, proceed by letting the Governor know that there is really very little information in the literacy field about "what works," nor do we have much of a grasp at the state or national level about the nature and extent of the literacy problem. Our estimates of the numbers of people "at risk" or population groups most severely "in need" of literacy services are, at best, fuzzy.
- If pressed to propose solutions to the problem, intone the latest buzz phrase such as "workplace literacy" or "family literacy" and cite some anecdotal evidence (that is all there is) that such programs can really make a difference. Try, if you can, to find comparative data in order to give the Governor an idea about the relative cost-effectiveness of these programs compared with traditional adult basic education or volunteer tutoring programs.
- Finally, talk about the importance of accountability, particularly accountability to adult learners. To close the circle, point out the need for some entity to be responsible for holding programs to standards that will translate into real results in learning.

If you find yourself getting caught up in all this candor, you should begin to notice, should you address the Governor directly (or, more likely, his or her staff), that eyes tend to glaze over when simple solutions are not in the offing. This may occur unless you are as fortunate as I to have the ear of someone like Julie Mabus, First Lady of Mississippi, who does not mind asking hard questions or hearing unfavorable news. There is now a real need for those seriously interested in moving states forward on the literacy issue to speak the truth and to go about the business of helping develop state literacy "systems." I believe that we need to move beyond the literacy network or coalition phase and toward the integration of literacy and basic skills services into a state literacy infrastructure.

There are many tactical reasons why building an infrastructure needs to become a viable state literacy goal. It provides a context for the real need for coordination, collaboration, and cooperation. It gives coherence to a Governor's involvement (which is typically multi-agency in scope) and provides opportunities to influence a Governor's initiatives in education reform, welfare reform, and economic development. And, most importantly, it can provide adult learners with services that are more specific to their needs.

There also are external, strategic reasons that should make the Governor and his or her staff take notice of the need to develop a state literacy/basic skills system. Primarily, there is the impetus coming from the establishment of national education goals, one of which commits the federal government and the states to achieving a completely literate adult population by the year 2000. Along with five others, the literacy goal was adopted in February 1990 by the nation's Governors and the President.

Given this new context in which Governors find themselves, with literacy firmly fixed on the national education agenda, what will building a state literacy/basic skills infrastructure entail? Building infrastructures must be informed by an accurate assessment of the literacy problem in our respective states. The process also cannot assume that all the adults we typically classify as "at risk" or "in need," relative to literacy services, see themselves in this way. It is therefore important that we view the system we are trying to build through the eyes of those whom we need to serve, if it is to be appropriate and successful.

Building an infrastructure can be defined as creating a system that will solve an identified problem. The fact that we are discussing building statewide infrastructures implies that these are not already in place. Thus, before any state can address the topic appropriately, it must first establish what elements are in place, even if they are not functioning as part of a coherent whole. Then, with a view of a system as a policy goal, missing elements can be identified and developed.

I would define one objective of such an infrastructure as creating a client-centered adult literacy/basic skills system that is "transparent" to the client. Moreover, we should seek to create a broad array of educational and support services (e.g., child care, counseling, and transportation) that are available regardless of where the client enters the system. A system of literacy/basic skills enhancement is not just made up of institutions. It must include mechanisms for policy and program coordination, accountability, outreach, and advocacy. Put another way, I see one function of a state infrastructure as the use and development of information for planning and oversight to better serve the whole range of targeted "at-risk" populations.

Questions I would suggest states ask in this process include:

- Should the viewpoint we adopt be that of an adult needing help or that of the head of a state agency or of a policymaker?
- Since building a state infrastructure implies that some unit of state government assumes the responsibility for achieving this goal, in whose interest is it to build such an infrastructure and in whose interest is it to become a part

of such a system or infrastructure? In whose interest is it to oppose such an infrastructure?

- Does building a system presuppose an invisible hand of collaboration and coordination, born of mutual interest? Or is it, more likely, born of leadership? For instance, assuming such a system or infrastructure serves certain objectives, who brings to bear the variety of mandates (both legislative and administrative) to achieve these objectives? Who brings into line state agencies that ignore federal mandates to develop collaborative measures in planning and implementing adult literacy programs?

I believe that the development of state literacy policy strategies can serve the goal of building an adult literacy/basic skills system. This task will bring into focus many of the hard questions that policymakers often face in other arenas. It is a task that necessarily includes political factors, such as the institutional and personal interests of key players. As such, it calls for the active involvement of the Governor and his or her staff—not to do all that is necessary to ensure the delivery of literacy/basic skills services, but to define the agenda, provide policy guidance, and oversee program effectiveness. Much of what needs to be done technically can be inferred from mandates provided in federal legislation such as the Job Training Partnership Act and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program under the Family Support Act. However, in the last analysis, it is the leadership of the Governor's office that can provide the tone of seriousness and coherence that quality literacy efforts at the state level so desperately need.

Goals and Targeting in Adult Learning Systems

by Jack A. Brizius

Establishing Our Goals

In late February of this year, an extraordinary event occurred, an event that may change the course of education in America. The nation's Governors joined with the President of the United States to articulate six goals for American education in the year 2000. One of those goals is particularly interesting, because it focuses on the subject of adult literacy. It reads:

> By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Let us pause to let the import of that statement sink in. In ten short years, we will make sure that every American is literate, has good job skills, and can exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. This is indeed a tall order. Even allowing for the normal tendency of political leaders to use hyperbole, this is clearly the goal among all the education goals that will be the most difficult to reach.

The goals agreed to by the Governors and the President say nothing about how we are to get from here to there. They do not specify who in society is responsible for ensuring that we achieve success. They more certainly do not address the issue of who pays for achieving our objectives. However, we at the state level have a good idea about who is going to be responsible for the literacy goal: We will assume that responsibility.

If we take this goal at all seriously, we must begin a thought process that will enable us to take this lofty goal and break it down into manageable pieces and get to work. I have been doing a little thinking about this goal, thoughts that I will share with you.

- What is the magnitude of the problem we have to solve to reach the goal? We can make some rough calculations. Assume that the low estimates of the number of people who need enhanced basic skills are correct, and that we are dealing with between 23 million and 40 million people. Assume, further, that it will take very few resources to help these people, that they are all motivated to seek new skills, and that we can gear up our systems to serve them. Assume also, optimistically, that our public schools will stop putting out people with low basic skills and that immigration will not grow. At $1,500 per person, we are looking at a price tag of between $35 billion and $60 billion—at a minimum—to reach this goal.

  This is a lot of money, but it is not nearly as much as I suspect we are talking about if any of our very optimistic assumptions are incorrect.

- Despite talk about the "peace dividend" and the willingness of states to invest more in literacy, it seems highly unlikely that we are going to be able to generate the resources to fulfill the lofty goal of the Governors and the President. The $60 billion is not inconceivable over ten years, but I see no ready source for these kinds of resources in the near future.

- The implication of the mismatch between our goals and our resources is always the same. We have to target our limited resources and try to get the best "bang for the buck." How we target our efforts and how well we spend the limited funds is an extremely important subject for all of us.
- There is another reason for targeting our resources. It turns out that in helping adults learn basic skills, there are differences in approach that relate to what characteristics they possess. Broad-brushed approaches, in which we offer generalized classroom instruction, do not work very well. If we target our resources to specific groups, we will more likely invent programs and approaches to learning that fit their special needs. If we do that, we also are more likely to do our jobs more productively and efficiently. This means that we can serve more people as we seek to meet the national goal.

Targeting Our Resources

The way the private sector generally makes decisions about "targeting resources" is to treat the expenditure of resources as an investment. We hear a great deal about "investing in people" these days. However, most of what we hear is rhetoric attempting to justify spending programs that are not really investments. Indeed, most simply reflect consumption. When you invest, you attempt to calculate a rate of return on a variety of investment strategies, then pick the one with the highest rate of return.

Unfortunately, those of us in the public sector do not do a very good job of calculating rates of return on public investments. It is hard work, the data we have is not good, and we have to make lots of assumptions. We can at least try to make rough calculations of the rates of return on those investments, particularly when we invest in basic skills strategies for adults.

Over the past three or four years, Governors, legislators, state officials, and others have been carrying out targeting exercises with limited resources. They have come to some fairly commonsense conclusions. I will attempt to summarize them here:

- Since the major motivating force in investing in basic skills for adults relates to our competitive position in the world economy, one investment with a high rate of return will be workplace literacy programs, especially those delivered in the workplace. In addition to the direct linkage to economic productivity, these programs appear to do the best job of solving the motivation problem that plagues all our efforts. People are willing to struggle to improve their basic skills if they see a direct connection to keeping a job or getting a better one. This means that workforce literacy programs have the best chance of producing what we are after—more skilled and productive workers. This increases the rate of return on our public investment, at least as measured for the economy as a whole.
- Another high rate of return could be in programs that help avoid social costs and the direct costs of welfare dependency and unemployment. If low basic skills are barriers to employment for welfare recipients and the

unemployed, perhaps investing more in basic skills programs within our welfare and job training systems will have a high payoff. In fact, recent federal law changes reflect this line of thinking, including authorization of the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program under the Family Support Act and amendments to the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) that allow more money to be spent on upgrading basic skills.

The only problem with this targeting logic is that there is not a very good track record for basic skills programs producing the desirable product—a person off the welfare rolls or in a good job following long-term unemployment. This is probably because there are a host of barriers that prevent the unemployed and those on welfare from getting good jobs. We know that child care, health care, housing, and other needs are as important as basic education to people who are trying to escape from poverty and welfare dependency. Nevertheless, we invest what money we can in basic skills as part of a package of services that might pay off in economic independence for people and cost avoidance for the state in the long run.

- A third targeting logic is to invest our resources where they will have the most long-term effect, regardless of the short-term payoff. This is the rationale behind the growing "family literacy" movement. The idea is simple. Teach parents basic skills and they will not only improve their own lives, but also be better prepared to help their children in school. Family literacy programs also address the key issue of motivation, for many parents are highly motivated to read to their preschool children and to help them get the education they could not. Targeting resources on parents with young children also may pay off by helping us achieve another national educational goal: that every child will start school ready to learn.

These three ways of thinking about targeting have become current in the states. In a recent meeting I had with a Governor of a midwestern state, he said: "I think we ought to spend our money first on giving our workers basic skills, because they pay the taxes that we need to invest in our children. My next priority is those families with small children, especially welfare families."

To those of us who have been in the literacy field for a long time, this type of targeting may seem to exclude too many. It implies that our only motive is to improve the economy or control costs.

Yet, given the magnitude of the problem we all face, I cannot blame a Governor for being willing to make the hard choices. In fact, in the state I am using for this example, I have done some calculations that make me think that this Governor may not even be able to afford to serve the two groups he has chosen to focus on. He may have to make some even harder decisions about which workers to help and about which families can be offered services to upgrade their basic skills. It may be necessary, for example, to target resources devoted to workplace literacy programs to a select group of industries or to workers with a certain level of skills. Family literacy programs may have to be limited to certain types of families, most probably those on welfare or those with very young children.

The implication of the need to target resources within the literacy field is that new resources appropriated by state legislatures will go to programs that are very clear about what target groups they plan to serve. Policymakers also will be very careful to ensure that performance measurement systems are put into place, so that they can see how well programs are serving those target groups. Generalized programs that offer literacy services to all comers will still be around, but they will not likely get the lion's share of any new resources.

Because they are categorical in nature, federal programs are already targeted. The existence of these programs will induce state policymakers to serve at least JTPA-eligible people and welfare recipients. State programs will most likely be devoted to workforce literacy efforts.

It is ironic, perhaps, that the broadest of possible national education goals—that every American be literate and have good job skills—leads those of us in the literacy field to narrow our focus and serve specific target groups. Yet, it is the clash of budgetary reality with lofty goals that makes us—and the policymakers we work for—seek solutions that are the most effective. It is unlikely that we will reach the goal specified for the year 2000. However, if we take the time to target our resources and build effective strategies for those we can afford to help, we will come much closer to the goal than if we take a broad-brushed approach.

Designing Quality Programs in Adult Literacy: State and Local Program Initiatives

by Judith A. Alamprese

Introduction

Increasingly, policymakers and practitioners in the field of adult literacy are calling for improved methods for assessing program quality. This need is driven, in part, from federal funding requirements to collect student and program outcome data. More often, it reflects state education departments' desire to create systems for program accountability or local programs' interest in determining the impact of services.

While the challenge of developing a quality program often rests with local program staff, state department of education staff have begun to develop initiatives for statewide program improvement. These initiatives are intended to create enhanced systems for delivering literacy services that are both effective and accountable. Although states vary in the approaches they have taken in designing such initiatives, they all have involved local programs in the development and refinement of improvement strategies. However, the extent and nature of this involvement differs and may account for the relative success of the various initiatives. The following is a discussion of the strategies that state education departments can use in working with literacy programs to build systems for quality instructional services.

The State's Role

The success of a statewide program improvement effort depends, in part, on a state education department's activity in three main areas: provision of leadership, development of an interactive change process, and creation of a funding strategy to support program improvement processes.

Provision of Leadership. Evaluations of recent state department of education improvement efforts have found that state leadership is critical both in setting goals for such efforts and in establishing incentives for program personnel to undertake improvement activities. States have used different strategies to signal the beginning of an initiative. In some instances, the department of education has required programs to use a competency-based process in delivering adult basic education services. For example, the education departments in California, Connecticut, and Maryland developed initiatives in which adult basic education programs were asked to implement a program improvement process utilizing competency-based assessment and management systems. In these states, programs' adoption of a uniform learner assessment system was a first step in creating a statewide system that would enhance program operations.

In contrast to requiring a specific improvement approach, such as the use of a competency-based process, state education departments have encouraged literacy programs to develop improvement efforts that are not derived from a specific philosophical or programmatic base. This approach to change is one in which local programs are given support to implement new operational strategies, but must identify the sources of assistance that can be used to help them. In either case, the education department's role in establishing an improvement strategy or in providing encouragement and support is critical to local programs' capacity to move forward.

Another aspect of state leadership is the staff support that is provided by the education department. States involved in improvement initiatives have found that

their designation of a key staff person to lead the effort has contributed significantly to overall success. While several state staff may participate in staff training and program monitoring, the role of the key staff member is essential in coordinating the implementation of new policies and procedures. In addition, this person can help ensure that all state staff speak with "one voice" in providing assistance to local program staff.

Development of an Interactive Change Process. Program change is not a static process, but rather one that is fluid and involves the constant creation and evaluation of new knowledge. In the case of literacy program improvement efforts, this change process must involve program development, refinement, and institutionalized procedures. While the development phase of any improvement initiative is critical, equally important are the procedures that are used to evaluate new efforts and refine them based on the initial implementation experience. Also significant is the process of adapting new procedures to a program's organizational environment, so that these procedures can become institutionalized.

Many state initiatives have developed interactive change processes by establishing advisory committees that are composed of local program staff who help guide the improvement strategy. In addition to using advisory committees, states have created ad hoc committees of local program staff who work with the state and outside experts in designing training and technical assistance.

State departments also have structured the improvement efforts so that policies and procedures are implemented on a preliminary basis, evaluated for their utility and feasibility, and then refined. This process allows for a field test phase that is essential to successful program development. Finally, once new procedures have been refined, program staff are given an opportunity to customize these procedures to their settings. This way there is an integration of existing processes with new procedures, a step that facilitates the long-term use of the new procedures.

Creation of a Funding Strategy. A major incentive used by states to encourage the adoption of new policies and procedures has been the provision of additional funding for staff training and technical assistance. In some cases, the state has designated one or more technical assistance providers to train local program staff in new initiatives. States often supplement this process by funding local programs directly to customize new procedures or document locally designed procedures that can be disseminated to other programs. What is critical is that the state provide incentives to local programs to try new processes, either through training and technical assistance or through small grants to develop new program procedures.

Summary

A successful state improvement effort can be characterized as a partnership between the state and local literacy program. While the impetus for such efforts may emanate from the state, the full implementation of improvement efforts is dependent upon a positive, interactive relationship between state and local program staff. As partners in the change process, state and local staff can work together to increase the quality and breadth of literacy program services.

Effectively Training an Adult Basic Education Workforce

by Sondra Gayle Stein

> The spread of literacy...is above all a mission that requires integrated strategy and policy, accompanied by educational activities well grounded in precepts of adult learning and anchored in community learning.
>
> David Harman
> *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma*

Introduction

Over the past several years, concern about the impact of adult illiteracy on the political and economic welfare of our nation has given rise to a vastly expanded commitment to the mission of spreading adult literacy. One sign of the increased importance attached to adult literacy is its inclusion among the six national education goals that were adopted by the President and the nation's Governors:

> By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

We certainly have set national goals to wipe out illiteracy before, most recently with the Right to Read campaign in 1970. What is different this time is an across-the-board understanding that we cannot achieve this goal by simply adding money for more services, or by recruiting and placing more volunteer tutors. This time, more of our federal and state leaders understand the need, in Harman's words, for "integrated strategy and policy, accompanied by educational activities well grounded in precepts of adult learning."

Key mechanisms for building this understanding have been the Policy Academy on Literacy for Jobs and Productivity, co-sponsored in 1987 by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor and the National Governors' Association, and the work of the Southport Institute's Project on Adult Literacy. In addition to the *Jumpstart* report, this project produced a number of useful background papers that articulated the need for an adult basic education system, akin to the public K-12 system and the public higher education system. Premised upon a thorough understanding of the contextual nature of definitions of literacy and illiteracy, such a system would need to be capable of responding to changing needs. A key component of such a flexible system is the creation of a support structure for staff development and the advancement of professional skills.

In "Professionalization of the Adult Literacy Workforce," Sue Foster cogently summarizes the need for a staff development system:

> Even though there is agreement among the leaders in adult literacy in the nation that pre- and in-service training are needed, the fact remains that there is no support system for professional development in the field of adult literacy. Indeed, in the sense that other professions are organized, adult basic skills instruction has not developed into a profession or "field" at all. Instructors are not encouraged to advance their skills, in

> part because there has been no agreement about the skills necessary for adult literacy instruction. Some policymakers still believe the myth that specific knowledge about adult education is unnecessary for successful instruction. Recent research and practice in the field has shattered this myth but many programs are still operating as if it were true. Until the infrastructure for staff development and training are provided in the field of adult literacy, adult education will continue to be viewed as an opportunity to help someone else using human qualities—compassion, caring, [and] sensitivity—rather than as an opportunity for continuing professional learning, growth and development.

Moving forward to create a well-trained adult basic education workforce requires two things: a consensus on what adult educators need to know, and a "delivery" system that enables adult educators (volunteer or paid instructors) to develop the skills and knowledge they need. Drawing on our experience in Massachusetts, I want to address both of these areas in order to help other states think about how they might move forward.

What Adult Educators Need To Know

There have been many efforts over the past twenty-five years to develop a comprehensive list of the specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes adult educators need to teach basic reading, writing, and math, to teach English as a Second Language, and to prepare adults for the General Educational Development (GED) certificate. The problem with such a list is that things change. A focus on the particulars means that your list has a built-in obsolescence. Changes in definitions of what adults need to know produce commensurate changes in what teachers need to know. And at any given moment, such enumerations can never be complete. The enumerators inevitably exhibit a bias toward a place in time, leaving out one or several competencies that someone else in a different place—the Southwest versus New England or Utah versus California—considers key to good literacy instruction.

A careful review of these earlier efforts left a statewide provider task force in Massachusetts overwhelmed. Composed of teachers, counselors, and administrators from both full- and part-time adult basic education (ABE) and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) programs and from community-based organizations as well as community college and school-based programs, the task force was convened to develop a blueprint for a Massachusetts staff development system. The members felt compelled to respond to this plethora of competencies by developing a set of principles or assumptions that would guide their own efforts. These assumptions were rather straightforward:

- A core staff development program is necessary in Massachusetts. All practitioners must participate in, at least, the background component of this core program, whether they are teachers, administrators, counselors, support staff, or volunteers. All teaching staff must participate in all components of this core program, whether they are new (zero to two years experience) or experienced part-time or full-time employees of any one

adult learning program, or whether they focus on literacy, ABE, ESL, or GED.

- The major goals of the core program are:
  - — To develop a broad perspective (broader than a specific program) among ABE practitioners, by encouraging reflection on one's practice in the context of others' experience and on reports or analyses of others' experiences (through books, research, and discussions); and
  - — To develop, expand, enhance, and update the knowledge and skills of ABE practitioners.
- The core program should have three components: background, curriculum development, and a teaching/training practicum. A separate orientation module (ten to fifteen hours) for new practitioners will be developed, with philosophy, approach, and content consistent with the core. This orientation will be offered at least twice per year (fall and winter).
- The core program should be accessible, with respect to time and place of scheduled offerings, to all practitioners.
- The core program should put adult learning theory into practice (i.e., the content and methods should be learner-centered).

Working within this framework, our task force arrived at a consensus regarding key categories of skill and knowledge that make up the core of knowledge that staff in the field of adult basic education must possess. Not surprisingly, these categories are remarkably consistent with those proposed in Sue Foster's article. Foster's list was shaped with the input of national leaders representing broad sectors of the literacy field. It should provide a useful framework for policymakers who are thinking about establishing their own guidelines for systematic staff development:

- Literacy staff should be well versed in the portable skills approach to literacy enhancement.
- Literacy program administrators should be skilled in the basics of program management.
- Literacy staff should be skilled in taking into account the particular needs, programs, and life circumstances of the learner in tailoring literacy enhancement programs to meet individual needs.
- Literacy staff should demonstrate a cultural awareness and appreciation of the backgrounds and ethnicities of learners.
- Literacy staff should be conversant with various methods of instruction and should be able to match the method with the needs of the learner.
- Literacy instructors, aides, and volunteers should possess good communication skills and should be able to orient them to specific groups of adults.
- Literacy staff should be aware of the relationship between the environment where learning takes place and the comfort and motivation of the learner.

- Literacy staff should be able to assess the skill level of the learner in the context of what is to be taught and how far the individual needs to progress.
- Literacy staff must be able to build into their curricula the ability to judge effectiveness.

What Kind of Delivery System Makes Sense

Centralized, higher education-based models tend to dominate our thinking about how to deliver professional training to teachers. A more flexible, decentralized model has been used in California, to strengthen the skills of ESL teachers, and in Massachusetts, to develop and disseminate learner-centered training in ABE and ESL for volunteer teachers. In both states the goal was to develop and implement a system for disseminating, as broadly as possible, an agreed-upon core of skills and knowledge.

The model used in both states might be called the "cadre" model. It is based on the ecological notion of training an initial team or cadre of trainers and dispersing that team to train expanding circles of trainers. Once such a system is in place, it remains a vehicle for quickly and effectively disseminating new information and skills.

Key characteristics of the model are:

- It creates a delivery mechanism rather than building an institution.
- It builds regional capacity rather than a central bureaucracy.
- It is "ecological" in that it is a time- and cost-effective mechanism for building the system. It focuses on building the human capital resources of the system.
- It is responsive to local needs, involving local providers in the development of training approaches, thereby enabling them to develop the skills and knowledge they need to enhance adult learning locally.
- It is flexible and can be adapted to a variety of needs.

In Massachusetts we had two goals. The first was to develop and disseminate a new learner-centered approach to training volunteers. The second was to build local training capacity, ending the dependence of volunteer programs across the state on one or two statewide trainers who needed to be called in whenever there was a new group of volunteers to be trained or a need for technical assistance.

We began by recruiting five experienced ABE teachers and five experienced ESL teachers to form the core teams of Master Trainers in ABE and in ESL. All had taught for at least three to five years, had expertise in at least one of the most widely recognized approaches to teaching adults, had some training experience or aptitude, and had the ability to work collaboratively. Among them, they represented (and lived and worked in) the five geographic regions of the state.

The process of training our first team was simultaneously a process of curriculum development and refinement. Being responsible for helping shape a curriculum that included their own area of expertise invested the team members in the whole new curriculum. In addition, working together first on curriculum development,

then on piloting the new curriculum, created a team out of these extremely diverse educators. Through this initial process, they evolved a common philosophy and a common approach to ensure that a common core of knowledge would be passed on when they went back to their home regions.

Back in their home region, the Master Trainers were responsible for sharing their new expertise with five or more teachers who, in our system, were also volunteer coordinators. In the early phases of implementation, the Master Trainers served as regional replacements for the statewide expert. Their task was not to hoard their expertise, making themselves indispensable, but to share their skills and knowledge, essentially working themselves out of a job by multiplying the number of teacher/coordinators who are expert in both training and in the new knowledge base.

After only two years we can already see substantial gains from our model. More than one thousand volunteers have been trained in this new learner-centered approach by twenty-five to thirty trainers across the state. In each region of the state, new Master Trainers have emerged, their skills sufficiently honed as trainers so that they can begin training other teacher/trainers. What is more, we have had the chance to try out the system with new knowledge, implementing in record time this winter a new training curriculum for working with adults who are trying to qualify for citizenship.

Over the next two to three years we will be using this model as a delivery mechanism for our staff development system for all ABE and ESL practitioners. We recommend it to other states as an excellent approach for the kind of carefully planned, long-term, sustained effort we need in order to build a professional adult literacy workforce in every state.

For more information about these efforts: in Massachusetts, contact Sondra G. Stein of the Commonwealth Literacy Campaign at (617) 727-5717 or John Comings at World Education at (617) 482-9485; in California, contact Lynn Savage of the ESL Teacher Training Institute at (415) 692-4300.

Strategies for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Programs

by Thomas G. Sticht

Assessment of Literacy

As Figure 1 illustrates, assessment of literacy is accomplished in three arenas. First, at the national or state level, adult literacy is assessed through activities such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In California, the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) is used for assessing the skills of welfare recipients and immigrants. These type of broadband assessments are aimed at giving us an idea of the literacy skills of adults, regardless of how or where they acquired these skills.

A second arena is the evaluation of programs. Here, we evaluate programs to see if the programs are meeting standards, maintaining their quality, and improving their effectiveness. This article focuses on this second arena of assessment.

The third arena for assessment is the assessment of individuals for instructional decisionmaking. Individuals are assessed to see where they should be placed in an instructional program, to diagnosis their specific needs, to determine instructional materials and methods, and to certify that learning has taken place.

Figure 1

Assessments To:

- **Describe Literacy Achievement of Adults**
  - — National Assessment of Educational Progress

- **Evaluate Programs**
  - — To see if new programs meet standards/accreditation
  - — To see if established programs maintain quality
  - — To improve program accomplishments

- **Assess Individuals**
  - — For placement
  - — For diagnosis
  - — For instructional decisionmaking
  - — For certification

Evaluation of Programs

Figure 2 indicates the various types of programs generally involved in adult literacy development. The figure also shows the different functions that programs perform, and suggests a variety of factors that can be observed to indicate how well a particular function is being performed. Focusing first on the instruction function, I want to raise a question with regard to the use of standardized tests or other instruments (interviews, portfolios, etc.) for evaluating the pre- to post-test improvements that learners make in programs. Today the U.S. Department of Education requires that programs receiving federal funds for adult literacy education provide data from standardized tests to indicate how well these programs are doing.

This raises an important point that I have not seen addressed, which is: What is the purpose of obtaining data on program pre-tests and post-tests? I will address two possible purposes: the use of data to monitor programs to determine if they are maintaining some established level of performance, and the use of data to improve program performance.

Figure 2

Strategies for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Programs

Types of Programs:

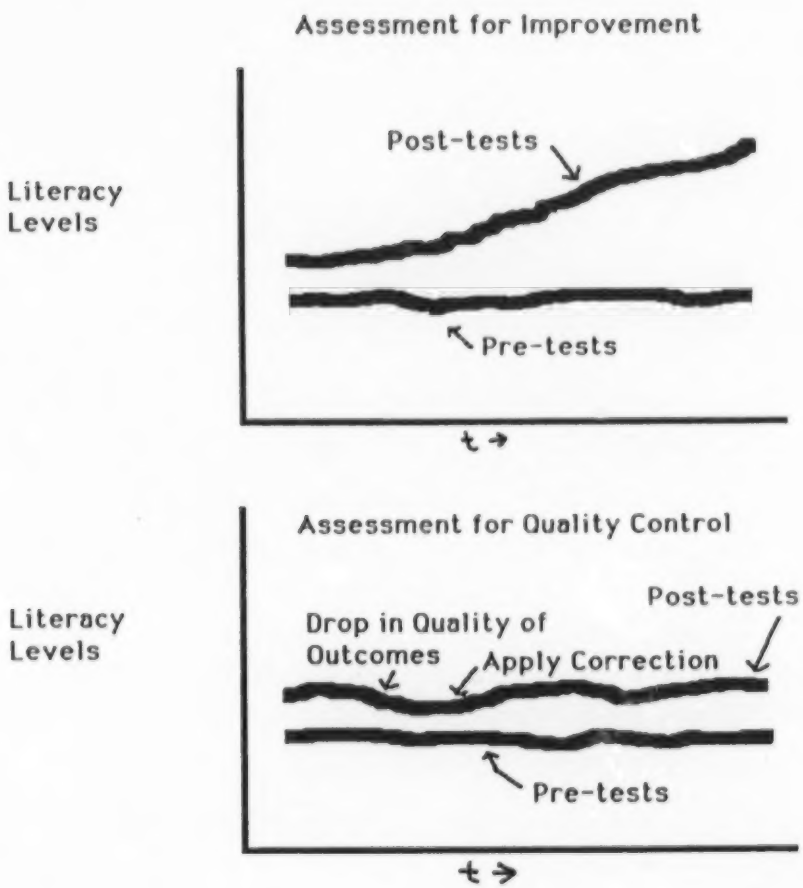
- English as a Second Language
- Adult Basic Education (less than 8th grade level)
- High School Completion (9th-12th grades; GED)
- Intergenerational Literacy (parents and children)
- Workplace Literacy
- Self-Improvement Programs

Program Functions:	**Examples of Effectiveness Indicators:**
Outreach and Recruitment	Numbers/Types/Methods
Enrollment and Retention	Numbers/Drops/Hours
Placement and Diagnosis	Options/Methods/Outcomes
Instruction	Goals/Processes/Outcomes
Counseling	Problem Defining/Solving
Support Services	Transportation/Child Care/ Job Location and Placement

Assessing for Quality Control. The bottom part of Figure 3 shows a hypothetical set of pre- and post-test scores and how they change over time. In the case illustrated, post-test scores reveal a drop in quality outcomes. Then, presuming some sort of corrective action is taken, post-test scores go back up. This illustrates the use of pre- and post-test scores for quality control purposes. Presumably, when we say that the purpose of assessment is to tell us how we are doing, there is an implied understanding that, if we are not doing well, then a corrective action will be taken. This assumes some standard for doing well, a point to which I will return.

Assessing for Improvement. The upper part of Figure 3 illustrates a hypothetical situation in which pre-test scores stay relatively constant, and post-test scores go up. This suggests that the programs are getting more effective over time. As the next data illustrate, I do not think we currently have good mechanisms for using assessments to improve adult literacy programs (see the upper part of Figure 3).

Figure 3



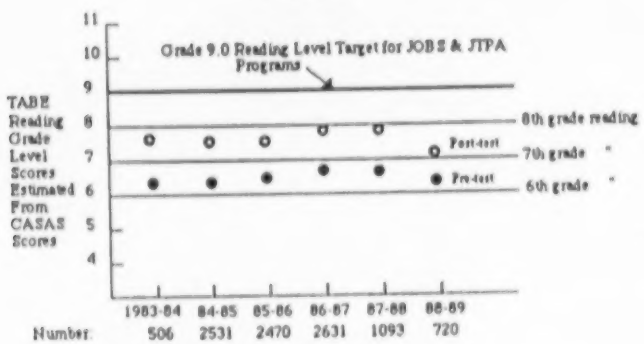
Pre- and Post-Test Data from California and New York City

Figure 4 presents pre- and post-test data from California's Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) and New York City's Literacy Assistance Center (LAC).

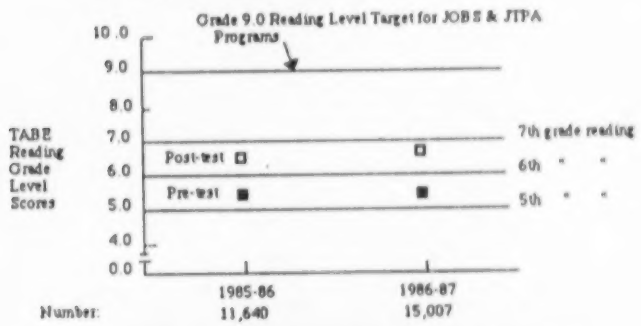
The CASAS data are for six years and were obtained from programs using the competency-based education approach initiated in the early 1980s. As the figure shows, from 1983-84 through 1988-89, the pre-test and post-test scores stayed about the same. Learners entered around the 6.5 grade level and left at the 7.4 to 7.6 grade levels, an average gain over the six years of 1.1 years. Overall, these data suggest that if the CASAS data were used for anything in particular, it may have been to monitor quality of output (bottom curve of Figure 3). It certainly did not lead to improvements over time (top curve of Figure 3).

New York City's LAC provides data for two years (weighted averages taken from LAC reports). Scores and gains differ somewhat for lower-ability and higher-ability learners, but these data indicate overall trends. Gains are a bit better in the second year. This might suggest that data are being used to improve the programs, but more years of data are needed to confirm this trend. Like the CASAS data, the LAC data show gains of about 1.0 year, in slightly less than average instructional time. The LAC programs are eclectic and are not necessarily competency-based.

Figure 4


Grade 9.0 Reading Level Target for JOBS & JTPA Programs
TABE Reading Grade Level Scores Estimated From CASAS Scores
8th grade reading
7th grade "
6th grade "
Post-test
Pre-test
1983-84 84-85 85-86 86-87 87-88 88-89
Number: 506 2531 2470 2631 1093 720

Average pre-test and post-test scores for Adult Basic Education (ABE) students in California's Competency-Based Adult Education Program for six fiscal years (hours of instruction: 80 - 120).

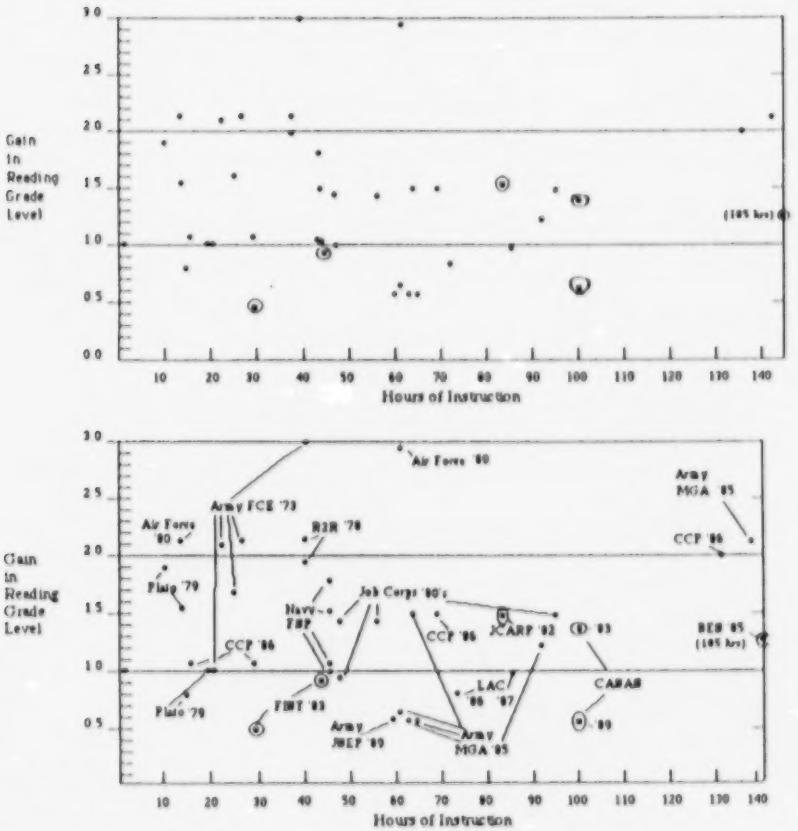


Average pre-test and post-test scores for Adult Basic Education (ABE) students in New York City's Literacy Assistance Center files for two fiscal years (hours of instruction: 73 - 86)

More Research Is Needed

I have presented what I think is a major challenge for the assessment of programs: how to use assessment data to improve and maintain the quality of adult literacy programs. We need to know what standards to set and how to achieve them. Figure 4 shows the 9.0 grade level of achievement as a standard for Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training and Job Training Partnership Act programs. The pre- and post-test data of both the CASAS competency-based programs and the LAC eclectic programs indicate that outcomes are presently well below that standard. Perhaps all that is needed is more instructional time. Figure 5 shows gain data for different programs from the early 1970s to the present, using a wide variety of technologies, methods, and assessment instruments. The programs circled are those that have been declared "exemplary" by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel of the U.S. Department of Education. As can be seen, there is almost no relationship between learning gains and hours of instruction. More instructional time does not always lead to more gain. As pedantic as it may sound, more research is needed to develop strategies for the assessment of programs that can improve adult literacy instruction in the coming decade.

Figure 5



The Case for Family Literacy Programs

by Sharon Darling

Introduction

As Governors, legislators, and state policy planners face the challenge of addressing the educational, economic, and social problems of their states, they are often faced with what seems to be an overwhelming agenda of worsening difficulties. The number of children living in poverty who are unprepared to enter the public school system is increasing. The undereducated, low-skilled workforce is ill-equipped to assume the job responsibilities of today or those that will help the economy prosper tomorrow. Efforts to reduce the high school dropout rate have been met with a slow response. Welfare programs, rather than meeting the needs of those they are designed to assist, often trap recipients in a cycle of poverty and dependency.

The problems faced by state policy developers and planners are compounded by growing budget deficits and an array of fragmented, uncoordinated initiatives, each of which needs increased appropriations to maintain even the currently inadequate level of service.

Increasingly, it is becoming clear that as federal funds are made available to expand state literacy efforts—under the Family Support Act authorization, the proposed expansions of the Head Start and Job Training Partnership Act programs, and the proposed increase for the Adult Education Act—there must be a new focus on coordination in order to recognize the interdependent nature of educational, social, and economic problems. Literacy and educational attainment are increasingly being viewed as common elements in the solutions to these problems.

At a time when literacy is a prominent issue, a focal point for state coordination also is starting to emerge around the needs of the family. The newly emerging field of family literacy is finding its way into state and local policy as a primary strategy in that holistic approach. Family literacy programs are showing up as major components in state reform strategies related to welfare, education, and economic development. These programs are being funded by a blending and coordination of resources from three or more state or local agencies. They can be characterized by the level of services offered and by the intensity of the intervention. In a recent publication, Ruth Nickse identified four types of family literacy programs, ranging from indirect services to parents or children to comprehensive models that serve both generations together in a structured learning environment.

Why Family Literacy?

Family literacy programs can address a myriad of problems of the most disadvantaged parents and children by coordinating fragmented initiatives and integrating the instructional components into a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. Intensive family literacy programs acknowledge that the family unit is the primary source of knowledge, language, values, and social relations for young children. Children's early experiences are the primary predictors of later direction; quality experiences are more likely to lead to later success. If parents and family members have low levels of education as well as low self-esteem, underemployment, and patterns of failure, their children will receive a barrage of negative messages about what is worthy, what is expected and acceptable, what is possible, and what is desirable. On the other hand,

the family unit can send the message that education is valuable, responsible behavior is expected, and goals are attainable.

Family literacy programs that bring parents and children together in an integrated approach are more than classes to help non-readers acquire decoding and sequencing skills or coaching sessions and reading clinics to help functionally inadequate readers develop fluency. They are more than parenting classes or preschool programs for low-income children. It takes more to meet the needs of disadvantaged and undereducated parents if the cycle of low literacy is to be broken. The family is treated as a unit, with services intervening across generations.

Recognizing that parents are their children's first and most important teachers, quality family literacy programs seek to meet the needs of adults who are educationally dependent and whose attitudes and abilities have been affected by bruising school experiences. Recent research substantiates earlier studies indicating that school dropouts feel isolated, alienated, and deprived. The majority of low-literate adults are dropouts, and feelings of failure and disappointment keep them from remembering school as a pleasant place or from thinking of education as a life value. Until those wounds are healed and attitudes are changed, undereducated parents usually will not pass along recognition of the value of education to their children.

Nor, in many cases, do such parents provide adequate economic, emotional, or social environments. Many undereducated parents want educational opportunities for their children, opportunities they never had. However, they are stymied by their lack of tools—the basic skills that will nourish intellectual development. A 1987 research study by Berlin and Sum concluded that the intergenerational effect of the parent's education on the child should mandate changes in educational systems that place equal priority on education and academic remediation for the parent. Otherwise, they said: "It is unlikely that we will be able to make a major difference for the child."

Making that difference is what family literacy programs are all about. Bringing parents and their children together in an educational experience helps eliminate some of the fragmentation and isolation of other preventive and corrective efforts, and gives attention to the intergenerational factors confronting at-risk children. The adults are acquiring more advanced skills, while their children are in close proximity at a quality preschool program.

Quality family literacy programs do not stop here. One of the major strengths of an intergenerational program is it creates an atmosphere that supports learning. That atmosphere is transportable; it shows up in the homes of the students involved in these programs. This is possible because both generations of learners also become teachers, participating in reciprocal and mutually beneficial components of the program.

The integration of the program components of the family literacy approach is showing significant results. Early research on the Kenan Trust Family Literacy Program, reported on by the National Center for Family Literacy, indicates that projects containing only an adult education program or an early childhood development program often are successful in achieving significant accomplishments for their clients. However, the Kenan Model sites that integrated all components of the model

into a system of services resulted in more regular attendance by the parents; greater likelihood of retention in the program; greater family influences; greater improvement in self-concept, and higher achievement than would have resulted from the administration of the separate parts. Even for parents who enrolled with an initial interest only in the adult education program, participation in the Parent Time Program (in which parenting issues are discussed) and the Parent and Child Together Time Program (in which parents work with their own children), and the close proximity of the early childhood development program, became major factors in their achievement and ultimate satisfaction with the literacy program.

Family Literacy and Policy Development

Comprehensive family literacy programs can address a number of problems facing state policymakers by targeting on the adult parents or caregivers who lack literacy skills and the children under their care. The most targeted and intensive of these newly developing family literacy programs are characterized by:

- Literacy, prevocational, and vocational programs for parents;
- Preliteracy or literacy instruction for children;
- Parenting or parent support for caregivers; and
- Reciprocal learning and teaching between the parents and child in the classroom and at home.

These components make family literacy a key strategy in many state adult literacy initiatives, education reform efforts, and economic development programs. Family literacy is particularly appropriate for the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, authorized under welfare reform legislation. It is a parallel approach to strengthen the family and break the vicious cycle of dependency. Intensive family literacy models meet all of the education, training, and child care requirements, and go far beyond the legislative mandate to strengthen the family that is receiving services. Family literacy programs, such as the Kenan Trust Model or its parent program Parent and Child Education (PACE), bring undereducated parents and their preschool children to school for twenty hours per week to develop partnerships for learning. Such programs provide high quality early childhood development classes for the children and adult literacy and prevocational training for the adults. They bring the parents and children together to model ways of extending the child development program to the home. Parent discussion groups provide a forum for exploring the difficult issue of literacy and family life.

The ultimate long-range goal of the family literacy program is to develop a lifelong learner of both the adult and child. The immediate goals for the adult are to develop adequate literacy skills so they can take the next step toward economic and social well-being, and to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to support and assist in the education of their children. The immediate goal for the child is sufficient developmental skills to begin school in a positive and successful way. The goal for the family is to break the cycle of illiteracy and replace a legacy of failure with a tradition of success.

Services Available for Family Literacy

The National Center for Family Literacy is playing an important role in the planning and development of family literacy throughout the nation. In the last nine months, approximately 250 state and local planners, program administrators, and decision-makers have attended two-day policy seminars conducted by center staff. These seminars, often attended by multi-agency teams, provide planning assistance in designing intergenerational program strategies appropriate to specific circumstances and available resources.

Training also is provided for program providers who are implementing family literacy programs. An intensive six-day training session prepares adult literacy and early childhood teachers to instruct adults and children in a family literacy approach. The content for these training sessions is based on three years of research and requires the attendance of the staff team that will be implementing the program. Teachers from twenty-nine states have participated in this intensive training and are provided with technical assistance and follow-up training by the center.

The National Center for Family Literacy has developed a database to track family literacy programs as they develop throughout the nation and has numerous publications available. For additional information on services available from the National Center for Family Literacy, contact: Sharon Darling, President, National Center for Family Literacy, One Riverfront Plaza, Suite 608, Louisville, Kentucky 40202, (502) 584-1133.

Valuing the Human Resource

by Don Woodside

Projected gains in the California economy over the next decade, the significant role of the high technology sector in that economy, and the changing demographics of the population have raised major concerns about the ability of the workforce to meet the future skill demands of the workplace. Concerns about the workforce in the last few years have been focused on improving the primary and secondary educational system to provide more qualified workers. Overlooked have been the estimated 3.1 million to over 4.8 million functionally illiterate adults in California, two-thirds of whom are in the workforce and most of whom are currently working. The realization that 75 percent of our workforce in the year 2000 is in place today, and that between 15 percent and 20 percent may be functionally illiterate, raised concerns about the skill problems of the California workforce and what is being done to redress the situation.

In March of last year, a legislative hearing was held to uncover what was known about workforce literacy in California. About $750 million in federal and state funds are spent each year on adult learning and training. According to a 1987 study of illiteracy in California, there are some 1,100 literacy service providers serving approximately 600,000 adult students.

The hearing revealed that not much is known about functional illiteracy, and little in the way of applied research is being done to increase the knowledge. Estimates of functionally illiterate adults are based on a 1979 study, and since then, the population of illiterates has changed in many ways. Furthermore, it is impossible to know the degree of illiteracy among this adult population.

While a substantial amount of dollars is being spent on adult education and training, the delivery system is essentially fragmented and uncoordinated, which makes it difficult to adequately assess the system or to plan effectively. More and more businesses are seeking assistance in providing literacy training, yet a delivery system to help them is not readily available.

In response to these and other issues, the state senate appointed the California Workforce Literacy Task Force. It was charged with studying, analyzing, and making recommendations on workforce and workplace literacy to enable the legislature to consider and adopt a long-range program for enhancing workforce learning.

One group of the task force is studying the literacy demands of present and future work in California and comparing the skill demands with the supply of skills in the present and future workforce. The major issue is whether the present and future workforce can provide the literacy, mathematics, and other skills needed to keep California competitive in the national and international marketplace.

The other working group is studying the present education and training delivery system for out-of-school youth and adults with literacy skills below the fiftieth percentile, who are not typically college-bound. One major issue is whether the present delivery system meets the needs of this "forgotten half" of youths and adults. A second major issue concerns the concept of "family" or "intergenerational" literacy addressed by federal legislation. This group also is studying the need for educational programs and research to develop a professional cadre of adult and lifelong educators.

Based on the issue papers that have been developed and discussions within the working groups, some tentative conclusions are beginning to emerge. Chief among

these is the need for a commission, appointed by the Governor and the legislature, to produce a Master Plan for Workforce Education and Training. Unlike the state's Master Plan for Higher Education, there is no master plan for the education of non-college-bound youth and adults in California that integrates the roles of local, state, and federal agencies; business, labor, and community-based organizations; and the formal secondary and postsecondary educational institutions.

There is an urgent need to develop a state plan for the establishment of postsecondary education programs to provide a cadre of professional educators in the field of workforce education and training. A key part of the plan includes a research center (or network of centers) for the study of youth and adult lifelong learning that is sensitive to regional contexts and subcultural groups, and that can provide a body of research-based knowledge in support of the professional education of youth and adult educators and trainers.

A recent report on the economic health of the fifty states gave California—the cradle of the computer revolution—an F for technology and innovation. What that low grade reflects is a lack of effort and, certainly, a lack of effort in the use of technology in education and training. We need to devote a great deal more attention to research and development in utilizing technology to enhance youth and adult education and training.

Due to the intergenerational effects of parents' behavior on the subsequent growth and development of children's learning abilities and attitudes, adult education for parents whose educational levels are inadequate to ensure proper child care should become a priority. Programs that integrate parent and childhood education, such as Head Start and Even Start, should be encouraged. Employers should consider providing parent education and training information and programs at the workplace. This is important if we are going to begin breaking the cycle of illiteracy.

Although many observers believe that the United States has one of the finest systems of higher education in the world, practically no attention is paid to the severe inadequacies of our vocational training and apprenticeship system. We have the least articulated system of school-to-work transitions in the industrialized world. The education of our non-college-bound youth needs a focus and relationship to the workplace that will result in competent entrants to the workforce.

It is clear that many efforts to promote basic skills training through state-assisted programs have been successful. However, the principal challenge for improving workplace learning lies with employers. It is estimated that most employers spend less than 2 percent of payroll on training, covering only slightly more than 10 percent of employees. According to the recent study by the American Society for Training and Development, *Training America, Strategies for the Nation*, "Anecdotal evidence suggests that most workplace teaching systems are weak, and workplace learning systems (R&D) are weaker still."

At present, with the exception of a relatively small number of progressive institutions, employers' commitment to employee learning is the missing link in the nation's human capital development system. This also results in weak linkages among employers and external education institutions, which slows the ability to transfer new

skill requirements and new knowledge from the workplace to teaching and research and development institutions.

Governmental agencies and community-based organizations are limited in providing functional skills training. I am convinced that much of the solution to the adult literacy problem of this country depends on the commitment of businesses to make the needed investment in formal literacy and skill training programs for all employees and to make training a common part of their operations.

The issue was brought into focus for me in two news articles. The February 22, 1990, edition of *USA Today* reported on the expectations for the German economy. A decade ago the West German economy was in a shambles, and the Japanese were mercilessly attacking the lifeblood of that country's economy. The West Germans realized that if they ceded control of their basic industries, their future as an industrial power would be in jeopardy. A new strategy was put into place: give up mass production of commodity goods and compete instead at the high value cutting edge of every industry. The result was that in 1989 West Germany was the most profitable trading nation in the world. "What West Germany has done is strategically perfect," said Richard Schonberger, author of *World Class Manufacturing*. "If the U.S. tried to focus on the high-value-added goods, we couldn't do it, because we don't have the [skilled] people." West Germans do not necessarily work harder than U.S. workers, says the article, but they are more highly skilled.

The second article, "A Japanese Import That's Not Selling," in the February 26, 1990, issue of *Business Week* magazine, tells about a concept of job security that still has not gained much acceptance in the United States. Many American companies have borrowed some of the Japanese management concepts, but few have been willing to protect jobs in a business slump. What struck me in the article was that the Japanese companies spend enormous amounts of money on recruiting and training workers and on keeping them on the job during a downturn. "They view that training as an investment, and they don't want to let that investment slip away." Meanwhile, with not much invested in their workers, the old "lay 'em off" philosophy still dominates corporate America's thinking.

These two articles demonstrate that the United States needs to be concerned about something more fundamental than adult literacy and skills training. We need to value the human resources of this country. The economic future of the United States, California, and every state depends on valuing our human capital.

Nine Points About Organized Labor's Participation in State Workplace Literacy Initiatives

by Anthony R. Sarmiento

> The organized labor movement realizes that education is not an arbitrary thing that automatically ends with a certain year of life, but that it must continue throughout life if the individual is really to live and make progress.... [Unions] realize that education is an attitude toward life—an ability to see and understand problems and to utilize information and forces for the best solution of [life's] problems."
>
> Samuel Gompers, in a speech to teachers, July 1916

1 Many state federations of labor (also known as state AFL-CIOs) are actively involved in current state literacy initiatives.

- An informal survey of state federations in late 1989 revealed significant involvement. Some of the most active were in Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.
- Among them, at least eight state AFL-CIOs had received federal or state government funding to operate basic skills programs.

2 It is critical that the United States develop a coherent and comprehensive system of lifetime education for all children, youth, and adults. This will require a greater commitment of public as well as private resources to education and training.

- "The responsibility for investing in the workforce of the future resides primarily with the private sector. It is important, therefore, to establish an environment that encourages private investment in human capital" (Commission on Workforce Quality).
- U.S. public and private spending on preschool, primary, and secondary education is lower than in most other industrialized nations (Rashell and Mishel).

3 Too many employers are reluctant or unwilling to provide training of any kind to the vast majority of their nonmanagerial and nonsupervisory workers. Advocates of workplace education and literacy programs are likely to encounter corporate investment policies that value quick and immediate returns over long-term competitiveness.

- Despite the widespread belief that private sector training is so extensive that it rivals the formal education system, available evidence suggests that employers underprovide training to blue-collar workers. According to a recent Conference Board study, only 18 percent of manufacturing firms provided nonexempt workers with training programs, compared with the 33 percent that provided such programs for managerial employees and the 28 percent that offered programs to sales and marketing workers. Another survey, by the Bureau of National Affairs, provided similar but more startling results. Fully 60 percent of firms surveyed provided courses to managers (50 percent to professional and technical workers), yet only 18 percent to nonexempt employees. Additional evidence on this point comes

from a content analysis of training courses offered to firms by outside vendors. Only 14 percent of the more than 1,500 courses surveyed claimed to serve other than clerical or managerial employees (Osterman).

- Only 10 percent of all workers receives any kind of formal training on the job, and most of those workers who get training are "managers and technical elites." Employers spend less than 1.5 percent of their total payroll costs on the education and training of their employees (Carnevale et al., *The Learning Enterprise*).
- "It has been estimated that employers spend $30 billion annually on formal training. While this amount seems large, it is important to remember that these expenditures are spread across 108 million workers and equal only 1.4 percent of firms' payroll expenses. In addition, the expenditures are very unevenly distributed across workers, with high-wage workers receiving the vast majority of the training" (Commission on Workforce Quality).

4 The number of employers who are running workplace literacy programs has increased, but most still see no need.

- "Despite surveys showing that a significant proportion of job applicants lack basic reading, writing, or arithmetic skills, barely one in four companies questioned by the Society for Human Resource Management offers remedial classes to workers.... Of the 74 percent that don't offer any basic training, however, most don't see any reason to get involved.... Many beg off by saying that they don't have the expertise, it's too expensive or it's somebody else's job. Only a few have tried it and found it didn't work. The findings, says the society, suggest that most firms don't see 'the basic skills crisis' as their problem yet" (*The Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 1989).

5 Providing education and training to workers is a sound business investment.

- A study on productivity growth from 1929 to 1982 by Edward Denison found that increased worker education (26 percent) was second only to advances in knowledge (54 percent) among the factors that enhanced productivity during the fifty-three years. In contrast, increases in machinery, plant, and equipment contributed only 15 percent of productivity growth (Cunningham).
- Education and training programs sponsored solely by an employer may become too narrowly focused.
- Economic theory indicates that companies will invest in the job-specific skills of their employees, but not in basic skills. This is because the payoff to any particular employer of an investment in basic skills is long term and those skills are highly portable—employees can move on to another company with no net gain at all to the employer who paid for their training" (Chisman).

6 Unions in the manufacturing, service, building, and public sectors have expanded worker education and training programs to unprecedented levels.

- "Outside of government, some of the most aggressive drives for worker literacy come from the trade unions, which are pressing for education benefits for members" (*The New York Times*, September 6, 1989).
- Joint union-employer education and training programs frequently are cited by recent studies of workplace literacy programs as the largest, oldest, most comprehensive, and most innovative.
- The collective bargaining agreement between union and employer provides:
  - — Stable financial support;
  - — Adequate safeguards to participating workers; and
  - — A structure that enables genuine involvement of workers in all aspects of the program design and implementation.
- Union-involved programs often incorporate the functional context approach using actual job materials with learners (Shanker).

7 Workers and their unions must be involved from the very beginning in all aspects of designing and implementing a workplace education and literacy program. Unions will not accept a role limited to recruiting learners.

- Workplace literacy programs, like all other worker education and training programs, are directly linked to job security, advancement, classifications, and the overall relationship between management and bargaining unit employees.
- "Sensitivity is important because the potential for misunderstanding is great. Employees need to be reassured that the [literacy program] will not result in loss of jobs. If they know what is going on and why, they are more likely to support the establishment of a training program. Without employee concurrence and cooperation, the Workplace Basics program will never leave the launching pad" (Carnevale et al., *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want*).
- "Workers want to participate in the design of these programs. Recent successful collaborations between unions and management in the automobile and telecommunications industries, as well as participation in training programs in computer and health care industries, have shown the tremendous value of worker input in the design and operation of training programs (Commission on Workforce Quality).

8 A critical first step in establishing a workplace education or literacy program is for an employer and union to identify the specific objectives of the proposed program.

- "Literacy" or "basic skills" can encompass a wide range of competencies beyond reading, writing, and mathematics" (Carnevale et al., *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want*).

- Reading on the job often is different from the reading taught in school (Mikulecky).
- There is one standard measure or test for assessing the literacy skills of adults (Kirsch et al.).

9 Worker-centered or learner-centered approaches are best for both the employer and the employee.

- "In establishing this program, the United Steelworkers of America and Bethlehem are implementing a shared vision that workers must play a significant role in the design and development of their jobs, their training and education, and their working environment. In a world economy many changes are unforeseen and unpredictable. Corporate success, worker security, and employee satisfaction all require that the workforce and individual workers be capable of reacting to change, challenge, and opportunity. This, in turn, requires ongoing training, education, and growth. Experience has shown that worker growth and development are stunted when programs are mandated from above but flourish in an atmosphere of voluntary participation in self-designed and self-directed training and education. These shared beliefs shall be the guiding principles of the United Steel Workers-Bethlehem Career Development Program."
- Guiding principles of the United Auto Workers-Ford Motor Reading Academy, Eastern Michigan University:
  - Build on what adult learners already know;
  - Teachers and learners are equal partners in the learning process; and
  - Make the learning environment relevant and authentic in the eyes of the learner (Fingeret).

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The State Role in Adult Literacy Policy

by Jack A. Brizius

Introduction

A national commitment to enhance adult literacy will require leadership, research and development, dissemination of new approaches to literacy instruction, and financial support from the federal government. While the federal government, the private sector, and local literacy providers all have important roles in national literacy policy, the goals, shape, and content of the system for enhancing adult literacy in America will be developed and implemented by the states.

A national effort to enhance adult literacy will require the complete construction of a major new system of education for adults. Building on the foundation of previous efforts, states face the task of developing a redesigned system that offers millions of adults a chance to upgrade basic skills. In building a national policy for adult literacy, what should constitute the state role? Where, between the exhortations of national leaders and the day-to-day delivery of services at the local level, should state officials work? How can states work to build a new system of literacy services sufficient to tackle the massive job that national leaders have defined?

Tasks in Building a New System of Literacy Services

One way of examining the appropriate role for state government in building a new system of literacy services is to determine the tasks that need to be accomplished so that millions of adults can receive basic skills education. A list of those tasks includes:

- **Millions of adults need to be motivated to invest considerable time and effort in upgrading their skills.** Adults who have failed to gain those skills through the public school system may be difficult to motivate a second time. A crucial task for federal, state, and local leaders will be to motivate adults to seek additional skills.
- **Strategic planning and policy development must take place and efforts at the state and local level must be coordinated for maximum effectiveness.** The current fragmented and inefficient system of basic skills provision must be redesigned by state policymakers. They must work to coordinate existing services and expand public and private efforts to provide basic skills.
- **Given the size and extent of the literacy problem, substantial new resources must be allocated to delivery systems for imparting basic skills.** These resources will have to be targeted to certain groups of adults. Key decisions about target groups and resource allocations will have to be made.
- **Thousands of new literacy enhancement programs must be created.** The current system of literacy provision will have to be expanded and new approaches to delivering literacy services will have to be tried and refined.
- **Thousands of existing programs will have to be improved and made more effective in delivering literacy services.** Current literacy programs provide too little learning for too short a time to make a significant difference for most adults.

- **Literacy providers will have to be trained, and a new professional cadre of adult basic skills educators will have to be created.** Most providers of basic skills education are part-time and few are professionals. Programs now provide little training and guidance to basic skills instructors. A new profession of basic skills providers must be created.

- **The current system of literacy provision will have to be encouraged to adopt new technologies and state-of-the-art approaches to delivering services to widely divergent populations of adults who need basic skills.** The application of technology holds promise for improving the provision of basic skills, especially in the workplace. Programs will have to be upgraded to use state-of-the-art methods for teaching basic skills.

- **Programs will have to be evaluated and made more cost-effective. Performance measurement and performance-based funding of programs must be developed.** As the new system is developed, continuous evaluation and re-evaluation of techniques for providing basic skills will be needed.

A Strong State Role in Adult Literacy Policy

State governments are taking the lead in addressing the issue of adult literacy. In general, they have moved from launching public awareness campaigns and using volunteers to serious consideration of setting goals, involving the private sector, reorganizing state agencies to improve service delivery, and allocating additional state resources to literacy efforts. Governors have organized coalitions and campaigns; they have centralized coordinating groups in their own offices and have begun to expand service delivery systems. Governors and legislatures are only just beginning to confront several crucial issues that must be addressed before the states can claim that they are truly leading the nation toward literacy enhancement.

A future agenda for state government in implementing a national policy to enhance adult literacy will need to address the following:

- How should the institutional leadership and organization necessary for a sustained effort for adult literacy enhancement be identified and developed?

- How can states best target resources to particular groups of adults who need to improve basic skills?

- How can states improve the quality of existing programs and improve retention rates, the speed of learning, and the portability of basic skills?

- How can states provide incentives for students or employers to participate successfully in basic skills development activities? How can other mechanisms, besides increasing the supply of services, be used to address the problem?

- How can productivity and performance measurement be injected into a system of shared service provision?

- How can states induce literacy providers to employ new technologies and the application of research and development to techniques of imparting basic skills to adults?
- How can states create a more professional corps of teachers and administrators of adult literacy programs?
- How can more resources be generated at the state and local levels to address the problem?

How Should the Institutional Leadership and Organization Necessary for a Sustained Effort for Adult Literacy Enhancement Be Identified and Developed?

State leadership must be institutionalized if a sustained effort is to be mounted. Governors and legislatures will have to provide a locus for coordination, funding, program improvement, training, and other activities to enhance the current system of literacy provision. At the same time, a reorientation of existing policies and programs will have to be carried out. Even as planning and resource allocation are carried out at a central level in state government, policymakers should be preparing the groundwork for institutionalizing the activity of adult literacy enhancement.

Candidates for assuming major responsibility for adult literacy include the economic development system, the community college system, the elementary and secondary education systems, or new entities created for the purpose of pursuing the basic skills agenda. In determining the most appropriate locus for the organization and implementation of long-term policies to enhance basic skills, state leaders will face a variety of institutional obstacles, most of which relate to the fact that literacy is likely to be a derivative goal for any major institutional system that adopts the literacy initiative.

How Can States Best Target Resources To Address the Issue of Adult Basic Skills?

Resources will not be adequate to meet the needs of all those who require basic education in the near future. Targeting will be necessary. To some degree, federal resources will be targeted through broad categorical federal programs. States are not likely to provide enough funds to serve all in need. Targeting resources to groups and to skill levels within groups will be necessary to building a new system of literacy services.

How Can States Improve the Quality of Existing Programs, Focusing on Retention Rates, the Speed of Learning, and the Portability of Basic Skills?

Judging by retention rates, speed of learning, and the few available outcome evaluations, many adult basic skills programs have very limited success. Practitioners in the field attribute this lack of success to insufficient resources, ill-defined program goals, the use of inappropriate instructional materials and techniques, the lack of a professional teaching corps, and low student motivation.

Adult basic skills programs should be related directly to the context in which the adult is seeking to learn new skills. All programs should be aimed at teaching portable skills. By portable skills, practitioners in adult education mean basic skills that are related to job or life experiences but that can be carried over into new situations. Adult literacy programs must improve retention rates. Because much

remains to be learned about the most effective ways to teach adults, every program should have built into it a system of performance measurement and an evaluation capacity.

How Can States Provide Incentives for Students or Employers to Participate Successfully in Basic Skills Development Activities? How Can Other Mechanisms, Besides Increasing the Supply of Services, Be Used To Address the Problem?

Possibly the most important, and least explored, challenge for states is motivating both individuals and companies to participate in the quest for improved basic skills. States may have to consider financial incentives to adults and businesses to induce them to participate in literacy enhancement efforts. Not all of what needs to be done can be accomplished by expanding existing programs or creating new programs. Regulation, tax policies, or vouchers or other forms of grant funds also may be needed to motivate private sector involvement in addressing literacy issues.

How Can Productivity and Performance Measurement Be Injected into a System of Shared Service Provision?

The current system of adult literacy and basic skills service provision is operated by a host of different kinds of providers. Deliverers of adult basic education include volunteer tutors, classroom teachers in community colleges, community-based organizations, school districts, businesses, job training organizations, and many others. States need a way of providing funds to these service deliverers that will ensure higher quality services. In addition, states must find ways to direct resources to certain groups and to adults with specific skill levels. States need mechanisms to measure the success or failure of programs in providing effective literacy instruction.

A major role for the federal government will be to provide resources to answer many of the measurement and assessment-related questions about the provision of basic skills. These outstanding questions currently preclude the implementation of performance-based payment systems for literacy services.

How Can the States Induce Literacy Providers To Employ New Technologies and the Application of Research and Development to Techniques of Imparting Basic Skills to Adults?

Through years of trial and error, adult literacy practitioners have developed a variety of means for teaching basic skills to adults. Adults do not learn the same way children learn. Adults with skill deficiencies, by definition, have had bad experiences in traditional classrooms. If they are motivated to learn new skills, it is usually because they see a direct link between those skills and achieving special goals – for example, getting a job or a better job, reading to their children, participating in community activities, or keeping up with public events. Teaching techniques and materials that are oriented toward adult concerns are more useful than instructional approaches and learning resources that are designed for the traditional school system.

States should develop mechanisms for evaluating promising new techniques and technologies and for making sure that the appropriate techniques are infused into the programs operating within their boundaries. States should create positions for staff whose job it will be to evaluate such programs. In addition, states should create new financing mechanisms for acquiring technology for adult literacy enhancement.

States should explore the uses of medium-term financing for learning systems, including bonds. States should determine the feasibility of group purchasing of learning systems financed by short-term or medium-term financial instruments or by general fund appropriations.

How Can States Create a More Professional Corps of Teachers and Administrators of Adult Literacy Programs?

Unlike other education systems, the current adult basic education system is manned primarily by part-time teachers and administrators, many of whom have primary employment responsibilities in other areas. For existing adult literacy staff, there is little incentive and virtually no support to learn the most effective techniques of imparting basic skills. Consequently, staff frequently use inappropriate materials, and provide instruction in ways that are inappropriate to the needs of the adults they are serving. Literacy instruction that is inappropriate and ill-tailored to the needs of adult learners, limited recognition of the need for skill enhancement, and limited incentives for learners to participate in basic skill programs, result in limited participation in literacy programs, high dropout rates, and limited learning gains.

States will have to build the infrastructure to upgrade the skills of literacy providers if they are to enhance program effectiveness. They also must set standards for literacy staff and require that literacy instructors and administrators meet these standards in order to receive public funds. Professionalization is closely tied to the need to evaluate and disseminate the best practices in the field. To provide professional development opportunities for adult literacy teachers and administrators, states will have to mandate in-service and pre-service training of teachers, provide a curriculum for adult literacy providers, and provide a mechanism through which adult literacy teachers can receive additional compensation with improved professional status.

How Can States Devote More Resources To Address the Problem?

Like the federal government, states historically have underinvested in the adult literacy service delivery system. Yet, in recent years, states have begun to devote substantially more resources to adult basic education. To meet the challenge of basic enhancement, states will have to spend more. States will have to increase total spending and they will have to increase spending per pupil in order to provide quality programs that have an impact on the problem. To support basic skills improvement, states not only must spend more per pupil, but spend more overall. Moreover, they will have to spend in different ways.

Conclusion

Although states have begun the long process of building a new system of literacy provision, they face many difficult challenges in the years ahead. This article has prescribed several key actions states must take to play a central role in enhancing the basic skills of adults. By providing leadership and support to the states, the federal government can catalyze state action. Together, the federal and state governments can provide the infrastructure for effective action at the local level. Federal leadership

must move quickly to support the state role. If federal leaders take action, state leaders also will respond to the challenge of a national policy to enhance adult literacy.